Winning the MOUT Fight:
Isolation and Setting the Conditions
By MAJ Brett Jenkinson, CMTC MOUT OIC

The purpose of this article is to provide tactical commanders and leaders with tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) to win the Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT) fight. In accordance with Army Field Manual (FM) 90-10-1 (w/Change 1), The Infantryman's Guide to Combat in Built-Up Areas, the third phase of the MOUT deliberate attack is "isolation." Perhaps the least understood phase of the MOUT attack, isolation of the objective area is the key to success in the MOUT fight.

FM 90-10-1 gives the isolation phase cursory attention by defining it as "seizing terrain that dominates the area so that the enemy cannot supply or reinforce its defenders." This description connotes the "outer ring" of the old Cordon and Search task. However, for the assaulting element, isolation requires specific TTP well inside the "outer ring" to ensure the unit can reach its foothold with minimal casualties.

BACKGROUND:

The Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) at Hohenfels, Germany hosts the Army's only MOUT Leader's Course, a unit-tailored course that enables unit leadership at the Battalion-level and below to master MOUT skills. It offers leaders in-depth classroom instruction and three to five days of hands-on practice to help them understand the MOUT fight. It spans tactical applications of MOUT from fire and maneuver in a built-up area through the planning, coordination, integration, synchronization, and execution of MOUT.

The MOUT Leader's Course teaches that commanders must remain focused on the basics of fire and maneuver outside buildings, use of smoke, and how to properly isolate the objective area prior to the first clearing team entering a building. These skills must be mastered first before immersing the unit in the particulars of Close Quarters Combat (CQC); unit leaders must know how to set the conditions for success.

The conduct of the MOUT Leader's Course and other rotational unit MOUT attacks provided the opportunity to observe over fifty MOUT fights during the past two years. From this experience, one phase of the MOUT deliberate attack clearly stands out as the key to the assaulting units' success or failure at the tactical level: Isolation. While not the most exciting phase of the MOUT attack, it is the true tactician's TTP for winning the fight.

Most units attending the MOUT Leader's Course expect to spend the majority of their training time rehearsing CQC. Although Change 1 to FM 90-10-1 provides definitive methods for CQC, these techniques are not the "end-all" tactical skill for conventional units to ensure success. CQC, in accordance with Change #1 to FM 90-10-1, is a difficult, technical skill that requires hours of rehearsal and thousands of rounds in a shoot-house to master.

According to the Ranger Training Circular 350-1-2, the average Ranger squad rifleman fires 14,500 rounds per year, 75% of which are fired at 25 meters or less. No conventional Army unit has either the resources or the time to

conduct such a rigorous marksmanship program. The Rangers are, without question, the best Infantrymen at CQC. However, their program is not feasible for conventional infantry battalions.

To compensate for resourcing challenges, conventional infantry battalion leaders must set the conditions well outside the objective area--starting in the classroom with maps and aerial photos. Leaders at all levels must know how to read the terrain, find the gaps that need covering, and how to get the right soldiers and their weapon systems into those key positions in order create coffins out of enemy urban fighting positions.

STATISTICAL DATA:

CMTC rotational data confirm that greater than 70% of all casualties in MOUT deliberate attacks are sustained outside buildings. Most of these casualties could be avoided with proper fire and maneuver and good isolation of the objective area. Unit lessons learned add credence to this claim. During one infantry battalion's recent attendance at the MOUT Leader's Course, the greatest lesson the unit brought out in its After Action Review (AAR) was the undeniable need for proper isolation of the objective area.

Their composite company of leaders, Fire Team Leader up to Battalion Commander, conducted three daylight attacks on the same terrain and against the same enemy set. The first two attacks were conducted with precisely like maneuver plans, resulting in 21% and 17.5% friendly casualty rates, respectively. During the third, the unit changed only one facet: how it isolated the objective area.

During the third attack, the unit isolated the objective area with M249 SAWs and the unit sustained only 5% casualties. The secret to the unit's success was not flawless room clearing, quick movement through the "fatal funnel" or lethal reflexive fires. The catalyst to success lay in how the unit achieved isolation from the Support by Fire (SBF) Position.

A dramatically lower casualty rate outside buildings was not the only dividend to proper isolation. Proper isolation later contributes to fewer casualties inside buildings during the systematic clearance phase of the attack. Sound isolation prevents a well-trained and rehearsed enemy squad from replicating an enemy company by fighting numerous, successive defenses during retrograde from building to building.

If not effectively isolated, an enemy squad can easily displace laterally or in-depth on the urban battlefield, causing the assaulting force to perceive a fight with a much larger force. Trading space for time, the same enemy squad can continue to inflict countless friendly casualties throughout the depth of the urban battlefield, thus miring the assaulting force in the casualty evacuation process.

"A WAY" TO GAIN ISOLATION:

I. Use of Task Force Scout / Reconnaissance Platoon: Typically, scout or reconnaissance platoons provide guides to the objective for the Task Force,

confirm or deny information (or answer PIR from the S2's R&S matrix), and perhaps even suggest the salient building from which to attain a foothold. While this information is certainly helpful, the Company Commander needs a more detailed analysis. These scouts / recon troopers are not being used to their fullest extent.

Unit commanders need scouts / recon to guide soldiers with key weapon systems into positions to isolate the close fight, i.e. the foothold building. This may mean the Recon Squad Leader leads the infiltration with rifle company machine gunners or SAW gunners to position them in the ideal SBF locations.

Further, as described earlier, these positions need to cover the gaps between buildings to prevent the enemy's repositioning from building to building. Squad leaders can then easily assign remaining riflemen to cover exposed doors and windows against unsuspecting enemy shooters. The key lies in placing high volume of fire weapon systems in the gaps between buildings.

The M249 SAW, M240B, or, preferably, the Coaxial machine gun of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV) or M1 Tank is usually the most effective weapon in keeping an enemy inside the place he will eventually die. If the enemy does choose to displace, the SBF position(s) in "the gap" has an easy job. The assault element's systematic clearance then becomes exponentially easier since the subsequent buildings are not as heavily defended or not defended at all, depending on the combat power of the enemy.

II. Use of Task Force Snipers: Snipers typically choose hides from which they can engage enemy in windows or doors of the foothold building(s) and those immediately around the foothold building(s). This line of fire is usually from a perpendicular angle to the direction or axis of advance.

However, the best use for a school-trained sniper is in the counter-sniper role, especially during MOUT. Only the sniper thinks like the sniper. A unit commander may envision an enemy sniper in an upper floor window or church tower. More likely, the enemy is firing from well inside a basement window, or from a position on the periphery of the built-up area, or from an interior room of a building through a small hole in the interior wall, and then through an adjacent room and its window. A trained sniper knows to look for these techniques. The average infantryman does not think this way.

The trained sniper or practiced sharpshooter knows not only to mask his muzzle flash but to also mask the audible report of his weapon. Therefore, to maximize the autonomy of a good sniper in the counter-sniper role, attach snipers or sharpshooters in the Battalion to the Scout / Recon Platoon for employment. The additional time in the objective area coupled with moving with a smaller unit will allow the unit's snipers adequate time to stalk and establish a quality hide position.

The Scout Platoon Leader must, in turn, develop the SBFs and sniper hides with respect to the assault element's maneuver plan and their associated Surface Danger Zones (SDZs). The location(s) of any snipers, Scout O/Ps, and tentative SBFs must then be passed directly to the assault element commander upon link-up to avoid fratricide. Again, the Scout Platoon Leader must be well

versed in terrain analysis and the maneuver plan of the battalion to be employed effectively.

III. Integration of Tanks and BFVs: The final key to proper isolation is integration of any tanks or BFVs. Armor and mechanized forces are best employed within their capabilities, typically outside RPG range of a built-up area. This means they play a crucial role in what may be considered the "outer ring" of the isolation force.

The outer ring of isolation, indeed, prevents ground reinforcement, resupply, or casualty evacuation outside the built-up area by the enemy. They should dominate key terrain in accordance with the FM 90-10-1 vision of isolation found on page 3-4 in Figure 3-1. To provide local security for these elements, the driver and loader should dismount with small arms to serve as an LP/OP for their vehicle.

These heavy forces should be prepared to collapse the outer ring on order to conduct close operations, if needed. They may also be used to provide transportation to the foothold building for the leading assault element. Once the assault element has dismounted near a foothold building, the vehicle must immediately move to its position outside RPG range.

The speed of such an assault is usually too rapid for the enemy to reposition an anti-armor weapon system to engage the vehicle before it is gone. Likewise, once the foothold is secure and the immediate RPG threat eliminated, mechanized forces can facilitate casualty evacuation and resupply for the assault element.

Again, rotational statistics show that units have an innate fear of bringing armor or mechanized vehicles into built-up areas. However, when employed in accordance with the above guidance, vehicle losses are very minimal when compared to the soldier losses when the vehicles are not used. When a built-up area is properly isolated, the RPG threat is contained, and routes to and from the built-up area offer some cover and concealment, there is little concern for vehicle loss.

CONCLUSION:

Units must avoid the temptation to spend too much valuable training time and resources training solely CQC skills in preparation for the MOUT deliberate attack. Even mediocre conduct of CQC skills will generally result in overwhelming domination of the close fight. However, poor isolation before the first fire team steps foot in a village will undoubtedly reward the assaulting unit with a CASEVAC validation exercise.

The keys to success: 1) employ the scouts / recon as guides to the SBFs, 2) employ snipers in the counter-sniper role, 3) integrate heavy forces, and 4) employ sound fire and maneuver during the assault. The bulk of the MOUT attack casualties can be avoided. Remember: historically, 70% of all casualties in a MOUT deliberate attack are sustained outside buildings. Where should you place your training focus?